



Nahuel Moreno

**How a
Revolutionary
Party is built**

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How a Revolutionary Party is built

This work is a course given by Nahuel Moreno (February 1976) at a party school on Portugal. This explains why most of the examples are about the revolutionary situation in that country and also about Spain. But the subject is valid for any situation of the class struggle. The examples are very illustrative since they specifically present a series of general characterisations.

I. Can we build a revolutionary party with mass influence in a revolutionary situation starting from a small group? Responses from IMT, SWP and PST

In Portugal, the Trotskyist party of the Majority is undone. It was a fairly strong party, with prestige, made up of intellectuals. The Majority line destroyed it. They called a congress that only 40 per cent of the party's strength attended; the other 60 per cent gave the order to sabotage it. In that Congress, the French comrades of *Rouge* imposed their leadership to be able to publish the newspaper; they have six or eight professionals paid by *Rouge* to support 20 or 30 militants who alone would collapse.

For our part, we also lost: of the Youth of around 1000 militants we had, we will have about 200; of 200 militants, we may have lost 100. This is the real panorama. However, unlike them, we are a coherent and solid party; we publish a weekly newspaper made by Portuguese comrades. Besides, our militants are all 17 or 18 years old; they know what *Intercontinental Press* and *Rouge* say, what is happening in Spain, but in reality, they know nothing at all. They do not know how to elaborate a policy; they don't even understand what "slogan" means.

In Spain, the picture is similar. The Spanish CP is said to have 100,000 strong militants in clandestinity; the SP has few militants but it begins to consolidate, as in Portugal; there are already great socialist demonstrations. As for the Trotskyists, the two groups should gather around 1,000 or 1,500 militants, each with a different opinion: in each region, they apply different tactics, they are a pandemonium.

With these forces, *can we build a large party with mass influence in the short term and lead the revolution?* It is not whether we "want" to do it but whether we "can" do it. It is not by chance that I speak of "a large party with mass influence" and not of a Bolshevik, Trotskyist, mass party. This party, if we build it, will be Bolshevik, Trotskyist because of its politics but, because of the circumstances we have already indicated, it will be difficult that it be a party in our style, with internal discussion, bulletin, tested professional cadres, made in years of militancy, etc. And I say "with mass influence" because I do not believe there can be mass revolutionary parties before the

seizure of power. Afterwards, before the parties disappear, in the process of building socialism, they may come to encompass the masses as a whole but before they can only “influence” them.

Let’s see what answer the IMT and SWP give to this question. If we go deeper and analyse their documents we see that, although they do not say it categorically, deep down they are deeply pessimistic; they do not believe that such a party can be built.

For this reason, the majority capitulated to the MFA [Armed Forces Movement]. They see that a revolutionary situation exists but they do not believe we can build a great party with a mass influence that makes the revolution. But they want the revolution to take place; then they look for shortcuts or false solutions. The IMT hinted that behind all its line under the V Government was the conviction that the ultraleft, the military (Otello de Carvalho, Almeida, etc.), all together, pushed by reality, would make the revolution and would lead it. They did not believe in the possibility of a party other than the military, different from the ultraleft, that would work in the mass movement with revolutionary positions, that would lead the seizure of power and become a great party in one, two or three years.

Neither did the SWP. In the document by Hansen, Novack and Gerry Foley, they say that if the workers’ and peasants’ government comes, the party will be able to develop. In other words, deep down they believe the party needs 10 or 15 years to become big and strong, for these 17-year-olds to grow up. So, let’s not worry if a “workers’ and peasants” government led by the SP is established, we will still be able to continue building the party. This is the essence of their position. They do not believe it can be done in the short term; therefore, they advise publishing Trotsky’s works and a series of propaganda tasks, without saying the party must consider the prospect of becoming strong because it will have to fight to take power.

What analysis do we make of this problem? We argue that there are four basic principles —we could almost say laws— that must be taken into account and recorded very well:

1) *You can only build a revolutionary party with mass influence in a revolutionary stage.* It would seem the SWP believes a large party with great influence can be made before a revolutionary stage. If when that moment comes the party is prepared, only then will it be able to participate but if we are in a revolutionary process with a tiny party, of kids, we are finished. They do not say this openly but their documents and practice express such a conception: the great task is to form cadres, cadres and more cadres. The party that has many cadres reaches mass influence when it enters a revolutionary process; the one that does not have them is liquidated.

We say the opposite: you can enter a revolutionary process with 12 comrades. (The Chinese CP had 12, entered the revolutionary process and after three or four years there were tens of thousands.) It is secondary with how many you enter [the revolutionary process]. Of course, it is much better to do it like the Bolsheviks, who were a small but not a tiny party. (In 1912 there were 50 in Petrograd but they had the advantage that in 1905 they had been a very strong party, with enormous influence and this remained in the memory of the workers’ movement.) But they truly became a great party with an influence of masses in 1917, during the revolutionary process.

2) *The revolutionary party can only be built in a revolutionary stage because only in this situation do mass currents emerge that are oriented towards revolutionary positions.* As much as we may push in a non-revolutionary stage, we cannot create a revolutionary mass current. Marx, Engels, Bakunin, the greatest men given by the world revolutionary movement, were together in the First International and could not create any revolutionary mass current because there was no revolutionary situation. Another example: the Trotskyists, the Fourth [International], we have not experienced a revolutionary rise, revolutionary situations in industrial countries since 1947, and Trotskyism could not make any revolution, neither during Trotsky’s life nor after his death. And these great currents of masses that arise in the revolutionary stage *“are oriented” towards revolutionary positions, they do not “make” the revolutionary party, they arise independently of us. And they will arise even if we do not exist.*

3) *The party is not built in an evolutionary process but in a convulsive process.* The Portuguese PRT, the Spanish Revolutionary Socialist League, they will not gradually make a revolutionary party

with mass influence. It is incorrect to pose things like this: now they have 100 militants, in six months they are holding a congress and they are 500, in a year 1,000... in a linear and evolutionary process. This will never be the case; it will be a convulsive process, in leaps. And it will be so precisely because the revolutionary party with mass influence is only built in a revolutionary stage. What characterises, among other things, a revolutionary stage is that the consciousness of the masses advances rapidly, albeit always at a slower pace than the pace of their mobilisations but much more than in non-revolutionary times. The slogans the party raised before were propaganda; they had to be patiently explained to a small vanguard; now the masses, driven by their own experience, “understand” them and take them into action. The party, then, ceases to be the nucleator of a small sector of revolutionary militants to become —of course, if it is deeply linked to the struggles and proposes a correct line— the leadership recognised by the masses.

4) *This process will take place through united fronts*, through the work on those massive currents that tend towards revolutionary positions and which are a product of the situation itself. Only if we know how to join these sectors will we succeed. This is why we said it will not be a typical, pure Bolshevik party. Great parties, great currents, even centre-leftist, can emerge, influenced by us.

Some historical examples

Seen in this way, the history of Trotskyism and the Fourth [International] is illuminated in a new light. What we say is not wishful thinking; it arises from the history of Trotskyism itself. Let’s look at some historical examples that confirm these principles we have stated.

In Spain, Trotskyism had three opportunities to transform itself, in a year or two, into a great party of the masses, starting from a small number of militants. In the early 1930s, there were 1,000 or 2,000 Trotskyists led by Andres Nin,¹ who had a certain tendency towards centrism. In 1934 a powerful Socialist Youth emerged, an expression of a world socialist current which was turning to the left and which was taking place with the greatest strength in Spain. In Madrid, there were demonstrations and mobilisations called by the Socialist Youth in which about 50,000 people participated, holding portraits of Trotsky. The theoretician of this socialist current proposed they had to join the Fourth (which was not even formed; there was only the signature of four organisations calling for its establishment) and stated the II was dead. Not only the youth; all social-reformism, socialist unionism (UGT) were inclined to this position, but youth was the vanguard of the process. Grandiso Munis² tells that the socialist leadership proposed that they enter to guide them, to lead them, since they sympathised with Trotskyism but knew little.

Trotsky pushed everywhere, but especially in Spain, to enter socialism. So Nin maneuvered in a stupid, ultra-left way, similar to what the Majority is doing now in Portugal. It was true the socialists were recently arrived political toddlers, led by Largo Caballero —a union bureaucrat who had collaborated with the Primo de Rivera dictatorship against the anarchists— who came from the extreme right and was moving to the left. Nin proposed: instead of uniting with Largo Caballero, let us unite with the communist right³ that at least has a level, they are communist militants trained in Marxism, especially in Catalonia. And together they formed the POUM (Workers Party of Marxist Unification), without giving importance to the Socialist Youth because it was immature. After all, it had no level, although it was a mass movement of all Spain.

Munis says that because of this error the Spanish revolution was lost. We are inclined to believe that he is not exaggerating, that it was indeed so. It is true the right-wing communists were highly educated people; they knew what they wanted: a bourgeois-democratic revolution, not the socialist revolution. Within the POUM, the Trotskyists entered into a hellish fight with them to win some militants against Maurin.⁴ And they were weakening more and more.

1 **Andres Nin:** Trotskyist leader until 1934, when he broke with Trotsky for the reasons explained here.

2 **Grandiso Munis:** Trotskyist militant, author of a *History of the Spanish Revolution*.

3 Sector split from the CP.

4 **Joaquin Maurin** (1896–1973), leader of the communist right.

If they had followed Trotsky's line and not Nin's, they would have been surrounded by the socialist mass movement. They would not have won it right away but it is likely that in 1936, when the Civil War broke out, Trotskyism would have become a large party with mass influence. Since the Trotskyists did not enter, the extremely weak CP did so, transforming itself thanks to this tactic into an important party. Because of this success, today the CP is the largest organised mass party in Spain.

In short, if the 1,000 Trotskyists, taking the objective process, had entered socialism, the Socialist Youth, if they had joined that process with clear, revolutionary slogans that delimited us from the reformists, they would have capitalised on a great mass movement.

The second example is from 1936 when Trotskyism had been reduced to very few militants. Munis, in personal conversations, said there were three in Madrid (we do not know whether he exaggerated). The Civil War came. What did Trotsky quickly say? Despite the fabulous beating he had given Nin, he sent a letter to a friend of his telling him they had to end the differences, at that moment it was necessary to discuss whether they agreed with the new stage that had opened to start working together in a party, demanding a response from Nin on whether or not he agreed to make the workers' revolution.

Here, it seems, the GPU intervened. That letter never reached Nin (it was not addressed to him but to Andrade, a friend of his, who was to show it to Nin) nor did Trotsky get a letter from Andrade stating that in principle he agreed. Italian historians and journalists found in the archives of fascism in Italy evidence the GPU and fascism intercepted the letters to avoid an agreement being made between Trotskyism and the POUM, which they considered extremely dangerous. The agreement would have allowed Trotskyism to become a fairly strong national party of 15,000 or 20,000 militants very quickly. (The Poumists said that in Catalonia alone they had 10,000 militants; Trotskyism was strong in Extremadura, in the rest of the country it had almost nothing.) But they did not agree and the fight with the POUM became increasingly hard and difficult. The Trotskyists were reduced to a few dozen militants.

Nin had revised his position of 1934 and raised again the need for the Workers' Front. Trotsky's idea was if an agreement was reached with Nin, to work together on the anarchists. (See the third example.)

Let's look at the third example. Then the big fight came: where should we work on? Trotsky insisted we had to turn to the CNT because it was the revolutionary workers' centre, formed by the anarchist workers, who did not want bourgeois power, and that it was a movement of millions, with mass influence. Trotsky said: Anarchist workers are revolutionists by nature and they have campaigned their entire lives saying you have to hate the politicians, the bourgeois state. Suddenly, its leaders enter to become ministers. What happens? "Anarchists use umbrellas for sunny days"; they spent their lives protesting against the bourgeois state and when the state collapses they become ministers. He said we had to work hard on this contradiction of the CNT anarchist workers, even at the cost of any sacrifice.

This line of Trotsky is great, especially for the current discussion of whether we should work on the vanguard or the masses. Back then, it was very difficult to work on the anarchist masses. The Spanish Trotskyist comrades used to say many years ago in Paris: "We abided by this line of Trotsky but we gave ourselves some terrifying scares." When a Trotskyist was discovered in a rally by the POUM or the Stalinists, Durruti⁵ appeared with four or five machine guns and massacred the workers he found, and what can I say about the leaders. (Thus, the POUM raised the line of its own army and did not want to go with them because they were risking their lives.) Factional work was not like in the SP or the CP. Nevertheless, Trotsky insisted that if that was the great mass revolutionary current of the Spanish proletariat, there we had to work,

What happened? They were 20 or 30 when this line was given, from May 1936. In May 1937, the famous insurrection of Catalonia took place, when the anarchist and Poumist workers, fed up

5 **Buenaventura Durruti** (1896–1936) was an anarcho-syndicalist who played an influential role during Spanish Civil War.

with the measures of Stalinism and the bourgeoisie, rose and took over all of Catalonia. But the anarchist leadership again handed over the government to the bourgeoisie.

And the miracle of miracles took place when these 20 or 30 Trotskyist kids, only with Trotsky's line, achieved a total united front towards unification with the Friends of Durruti group.⁶ They united with the Libertarian Youth; in other words, with a quarter or half of the greatest leaders of the most important unions, who were also great revolutionaries in all of Spain. This union was forged in the streets of Catalonia, and the Friends of Durruti asked the Trotskyists to write the flyers for them. There were large banners of the united front of the Libertarian Youth, the Friends of Durruti and the Bolshevik-Leninists (Trotskyists).

Why did this front fail? Because the revolution fell apart. Let us now calculate what would have happened if the Catalan proletariat had not been defeated in 1937. It is clear to us: within a year they would have been all unified, with Trotskyism leading a large part of the CNT unions and the socialist unions, with a movement and a party of 100,000, 200,000, 1,000,000. The Socialists' story was repeated.

The first and third experiences are the decisive ones. Later, they were always many fewer than the Portuguese are now. Summarising: it was possible to make a party with mass influence; in the first case this was frustrated by a wrong line, by not entering the Socialist Youth in 1934; in the second case, police intervention, weakness and lack of contact; in the third, the retreat of the revolutionary movement, although we were scratching there.

There is another example, on the positive side, which is Bolivia. There Trotskyism became an incredible mass movement, which led unions and led the 1957 insurrection. When was Trotskyism, which started from a dozen militants, transformed into a party with mass influence? When it joined the great revolutionary union current of the industrial proletariat (let's call it that), led by Lechin.⁷

In Bolivia, the union movement was essentially artisanal. In 1944, there was a Bonapartist *sui generis* military coup that attempted to organise something similar to what Peronism did, a capitalist workers' movement of mines and industry. When this organisation began, Trotskyism saw this movement and got into it, joining with a pact to the union leaders who wanted to organise those unions. They participated in this colossal objectively revolutionary mass movement, as was the unionisation of miners on a massive scale for the first time in the history of Bolivia. The first merit of Bolivian Trotskyism is having understood it, consciously or unconsciously. Its second merit is that in 1946, when an electoral stage began and there were elections, Trotskyism proposed to these leaders to form a workers' bloc; it did not ask them to enter its party through an evolutionary process...

Thus, those two successes which allowed us to become a great mass party are: having understood the importance of the massive unionisation of the mining proletariat and then having understood the electoral problem and raised class candidates. So great were these successes that they allowed us to survive despite two catastrophic mistakes that go against what we say.

The two mistakes are: not having raised the transformation of the electoral workers' front into a large workers' party independent of the MNR. Thus, many union leaders who did not want to enter Trotskyism and who had to be in some political [party] went to the MNR. But the catastrophic error was the second. When the Bolivian masses made a revolution, Trotskyist for its program and its leadership—or its semi-leadership, because they led it between Lechin and the Trotskyists—, and when power was left in the hands of the proletariat, Trotskyism raised the line of critical support for the MNR instead of raising the line: "All power to the COB against the MNR."

What interests us now is that in Bolivia, Trotskyism, in a few years, with a few kids, and thanks to two great political successes, understanding and penetrating the mass movement, could transform itself into a party with great influence in that movement.

6 The **Friends of Durruti Group** was an anarchist group in Spain. It was founded on March 1937 and named after deceased anarchist hero Buenaventura Durruti.

7 **Juan Lechin** (1914–2001) was the most important trade-union leader and bureaucrat of Bolivian unionism. He was head of the Federation of Bolivian Mine Workers (FSTMB) from 1944 to 1987 and founder of the Bolivian Workers' Union (COB) in the revolution of 1952, which he headed until 1987.

Here [in Argentina], we also have some examples, although on a smaller scale, because in Argentina large revolutionary currents of the masses did not arise, although some incipient did. We have lived the alert of Peronism. But the party achieved colossal successes, even though it was not very numerous. Those who know the history of the party know that from 1956 to 1959 our newspaper was the most widely read in the workers' movement; in the plenaries of the 62,⁸ what our party said was done by everyone; we sat down and Vandor⁹ and all the main leaders of the CGT waited to see what we said; if we said yes, what was proposed was voted on; if we said no, they did not dare to go against it. We came to lead the UOM [Metalworkers Union] because we came to understand the great mass process. First, we understood it came from the internal commissions, which would recover the unions. This was the first success of the party. And the second great success was to understand that an entire trade union left had arisen based on these internal commissions, which would take place as a real mass movement. This took us to lead unions and linked us to the vanguard. After 1956–1957 we realised that within Peronism, Peronist workers' groups would emerge: union activists met to discuss with what tactics to recover unions and internal commissions. This was the most important mass factor ever, and the party worked there.

II. How does the party develop its policy to become a revolutionary party with mass-influence?

There are five basic questions that we must answer at any stage of the process of the class struggle but fundamentally at a stage of revolutionary rise. These five questions, which are the key to the problem, make up a decisive methodological aid.

The first question is about the *character of the stage*.

The second: *where we will work and how we will guide our work*.

The third: *what tactic and strategy we adopt*.

The fourth: *how we concretise the government formula*. (It has to do with strategy and tactics, but it is a privileged—let's call it so—tactic.)

The fifth: *what program and what slogans we propose*.

We must answer them well and also combine them well. Otherwise, we will not achieve a revolutionary Bolshevik policy. For example, we have concluded we are in a revolutionary stage. Suddenly, that character changes a little; there is still a revolutionary rise but within the rise, there is a certain setback. This can change our orientation or where we work; perhaps this is not the case and what we need is to change the offensive nature of our policy and make it more defensive. If we run down the rail of each question and do not combine it, we will fail; we will not be able to build the revolutionary party with mass influence. It seems very easy, but so far the only party in the world that, in addition to answering these questions well, knew how to combine them correctly was the Bolshevik Party.

1. Characterisation of the stage

It is decisive to specify the stage: whether it is revolutionary, non-revolutionary, counter-revolutionary, etc. But here the problem is just beginning. The one who says: "the stage is revolutionary" and believes this is where everything comes from will hit his head against the wall. (This happened to Mandel: he characterised the current stage in Portugal as pre-revolutionary in the transition to revolutionary and from there he concluded there is no need to touch the problem of the Constituent Assembly or participate in the elections.) This definition is useless if we do not take into account that

⁸ It refers to the **62 Peronist Trade Union Organisations**, the organisation of struggle of the Argentine workers' movement against the regime of the "Liberating Revolution", born from the *coup d'état* that overthrew Peron in 1955. Later they transformed themselves into a grouping of the bureaucratic leadership of Peronist trade unionism.

⁹ **Augusto Timoteo Vandor** (1923-1969) was a bureaucrat Secretary General of the powerful Metalworkers' Union (UOM).

it is the starting point, but then we must specify the sub-stages, the specific characteristics of that situation. The poorest, the weakest, what tells the least to the dialectical thought is the definition. Unfortunately, we have to start there to know what we have to describe. But then we must point out what are the contradictions within this definition, what aspect nullifies it and makes it weaker, what nuances it acquires, etc. Within each stage, there are sub-stages, situations of rising, defensive or offensives of the mass movement, etc. Although it may not change the character of the stage, we can define it as revolutionary *sui generis*,¹⁰ revolutionary, pre-revolutionary.

The important thing is the description and within it a decisive question: we have to try to specify the fundamental contradiction that every stage presents, especially when it is revolutionary or pre-revolutionary. (Decisive and fundamental not regarding society as a whole but to the working class and the masses.) The essential axis of our policy is to solve this contradiction.

1a. The contradiction between situation and consciousness

If the stage is revolutionary, the bourgeoisie is falling, the masses are on the offensive, the petty bourgeoisie turns to the left, and there is a revolutionary party or an organ of power. If the bourgeoisie is not too bad and the other elements are there, the situation is pre-revolutionary. This is about society as a whole. But if we analyse relation to the mass movement, what is the fundamental contradiction? In general, for all stages, it is the contradiction between the situation of the workers' movement and its consciousness. In a stage that is not revolutionary, or that is counter-revolutionary, how does this contradiction appear? For example, if you are under fascism, the workers do not have freedom, there can be no independent unions, they are almost transformed into slave workers if there is war and it forces them to work 12 hours. The situation is passive. But the consciousness of the working class is sometimes more advanced than the situation because it says "how bad we are, we work 12 hours". If it is not more advanced, we will try to make it progress, to understand the situation and to create a contradiction between consciousness and the situation that allows us to take action.

In a fascist country, like Spain 10 or 15 years ago or here under Onganía,¹¹ there was no revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situation. The workers were made to work, they could not go on strike because it was prohibited, and those who thought were thrown in jail because of the anti-communist law. There were no great struggles; the worker "suffered" the situation. But the consciousness of the working class is almost always more advanced. There was a certain discomfort of consciousness, an existentialist would say. The worker said: "under Onganía they exploit us, we cannot go on strike, and if we read a left-wing book they put us in jail". We try to develop this contradiction between the situation and the consciousness, to achieve a critical consciousness that says: "Down with Onganía. We cannot live like this, we cannot think." Philosophers call this "critical consciousness".

But let's see what happens in a pre-revolutionary or revolutionary situation: the working class is no longer in a situation to start taking action. The worker ceases to have a critical consciousness: he goes out, strikes against the government and transforms his criticism into a target. There are many people: it is no longer about partial strikes; everybody makes demonstrations, like today in Spain. The characteristic is the actions of the class, which are revolutionary. Before, consciousness was more advanced than the situations; not now. *The most tremendous contradiction of any revolutionary situation is that the class consciousness is thousands of kilometres further behind than its actions.*

This contradiction was most acute both in the Bolivian Revolution¹² and the Russian Revolution. What did the Russian workers do in February? They made the workers' revolution, they took power. But because of their level of consciousness, who did they give it to? To the bourgeois parties. Between

10 This is how we call the stage that meets the objective conditions of a revolutionary situation and there is no revolutionary party recognised by the masses as leadership.

11 **Juan Carlos Onganía** (1914 –1995) was de facto President of Argentina from 29 June 1966 to 8 June 1970. He rose to power as military dictator after toppling the president Arturo Illia in a *coup d'état* self-named "Argentine Revolution".

12 See the example of Bolivia in Part I.

their bourgeois consciousness at the service of the bourgeois parties and the workers' revolution they made with their hands, in the struggle, there was enormous distance.

Revolutionary politics consist of getting consciousness matched with action. While in a non-revolutionary situation the aim is to make the action respond to the critical consciousness, the decisive contradiction in a revolutionary situation is between the consciousness and the actions of the class; these are objectively revolutionary. They hold demonstrations, occupy factories, defeat the right on the streets, they have power in their hands. But their consciousness still lags; in Portugal, they believe in the MFA, in Soares,¹³ in Stalinism, in the imbeciles of the ultraleft, in Russia they believed in the Social Revolutionaries, in the Mensheviks. These are the sectors that reflect the level of consciousness of the class. This contradiction is decisive, and when we specify a stage the issue is complex because what must be pointed out is this uneven and contradictory development between consciousness and the objective revolutionary situation, between what the masses do and what they think and between their different sectors (because some are close to the consciousness of the revolutionary situation and others are not). Here lies the difficult part: knowing how to describe well how consciousness advances. It advances a lot forced by revolutionary actions, it advances at great speed, it is not petrified but it advances less than the actions, although there is a moment when they match each other.

The February and October revolutions in Russia were that. The February revolution was a tremendous contradiction between the consciousness of the masses and the workers' revolution that they had made. The October Revolution was the matching between the mass consciousness and its practice; it was the solution to that contradiction. In February, the contradiction was extremely acute and in October it was resolved, the fabulous action of the mass movement, which had already come from February, was united with its consciousness, it was a gigantic explosion.

The decisive factor of consciousness is the party. It has to act on that contradiction; right here everything is provided to the party; at another stage, it would not be so easy because there is no such contradiction between action and consciousness.

1b. How the party acts on the contradiction between situation and consciousness. Consciousness is also a contradictory phenomenon

In Portugal today, the contradiction between the actions of the masses and their consciousness is the trust they place on the SP. In this relationship we see that the distance is shortening: the action has led them to break with the CP and the MFA. But outside of this relationship, does the fact the constitution is voted on denote a high level of consciousness, which matches with the actions? No; it is a symptom of terrible backwardness because it means capitulating to the bourgeois institutions, believing the bourgeois constitution can guarantee the workers' power. That the Constituent Assembly regulates the conquests of the workers' movement, such as control and the workers' commissions, implies creating a bureaucracy there (the regulation is this: for a workers' commission to be recognised, there must be an assembly of more than 50 per cent of members with a secret vote; it means that a government inspector is coming, and this is the first weapon to liquidate the commissions). Consciousness would be the opposite: that there would have been a great strike so this policy was not imposed. Mandel is correct in arguing we refuse that the Constituent Assembly regulates any of the conquests of the mass movement because it will regulate them to liquidate them.

Is it a sign of progress that in the political arena the CP is repudiated, that the masses are anti-communists? It is also a sign of backwardness because that is what the bourgeoisie wants. It is one thing to repudiate the politics of the CP and another to repudiate the workers of the CP. That this line of the SP is accepted is a symptom of backwardness, as it is also that they collaborate with Costa Gomez, like the fact all the socialist and communist masses come out screaming: "Long live General

13 **Mario Soares** (1924–2017) was a Portuguese politician, who served as Prime Minister of Portugal from 1976 to 1978 and from 1983 to 1985, and subsequently as President of Portugal from 1986 to 1996. He was the first Secretary-General of the Socialist Party, from its foundation in 1973 to 1986.

Costa Gomez, long live Fanés, long live our saviour!” Another symptom of brutal backwardness is that the masses applaud the return of “Renascença” radio to the Catholic Church.

But the development of consciousness is also contradictory. The working class, especially in a revolutionary stage, cannot have a counter-revolutionary consciousness; but this consciousness has positive and negative aspects, it is not homogeneous. We see it in the current consciousness of the workers in Portugal. In what sense is it progressive? As the SWP points out, they want democracy in all of Portugal in all areas. What is the negative aspect? They believe in the institutions of the bourgeoisie, in the characters of the bourgeoisie and the collaboration of classes; they have not yet risen to the consciousness of a workers’ revolution and a dictatorship of the proletariat, which are antagonistic to bourgeois institutions; they have not risen to the consciousness of an intransigent class struggle that raises the problem of power. Put another way, concerning the problem of power the consciousness is still reactionary, very backward; they believe in the military, they believe in the politics of class collaboration, they believe in the sixth government. They trust the SP; the socialist masses do not react when Soares says: “We are waiting for the army to tell us who will be a candidate for president because he will be ours”. When Soares says the incorporation of workers’ control and the workers’ commissions into the Constituent Assembly is great progress, they do not reply that they do not agree because then they will control the bourgeois state; they do not say: “we do not want bourgeois control over our conquests, what we want is that these conquests develop to destroy the bourgeois state.”

Thus, it is a contradictory but essentially backward consciousness because they believe in the SP and all its bourgeois-democratic ideology. The positive is the democratic aspect. Although it reflects a non-revolutionary bourgeois-democratic ideology, it presents a contradiction: these masses want the workers’ commissions. This is already directly revolutionary. It is not progressive just because they believe in democracy but because they believe in workers’ control, in nationalisations and are willing to defend them. In other words, it is a contradictory, dynamic consciousness that is learning impacted by the actions of the class itself, which believes in the workers’ commissions because the class has made them, believes in nationalisations because the class achieved them, believes in workers’ control for the same reason, believes in democracy—which is very positive—because the masses have been achieving democracy. What is its very backward aspect? That they believe in bourgeois democracy and the SP as a tool to achieve it.

Concerning the contradiction between actions and consciousness, what policies do the SWP and the Majority apply in Portugal? The Majority sees the great objective achievements won by the actions of the mass movement. The SWP sees what the class thinks without perceiving the contradiction with the actions or the contradictions of the consciousness itself.

What is our policy? First, we need to analyse what are the characteristics of the fundamental contradictions. If the consciousness is more advanced than the actions of the class, the stage is neither pre-revolutionary nor revolutionary; if the relationship is reversed between revolutionary actions and conquests with consciousness, the stage is revolutionary. (We need to specify as best as possible what the worker believes, not to say generalities.) After defining this relationship, we cannot take into account only the actions of the masses, as the Majority does, or only their level of consciousness, as the SWP does; it is criminal to eliminate either of the two factors. In a revolutionary situation we take both elements to try to raise consciousness to the next level, but to raise it we start from the fact that it is contradictory and very dynamic. And so we try to develop the contradiction.

For example, we believe that in Portugal the slogan “Out with the military that nobody voted for, for a government elected by the people!” begins to have the possibility of transforming itself into a tremendous slogan. All the socialist workers who are for democracy in the unions and the country are in contradiction because the SP allows the military to elect a general for president. We have to see how we exploit this contradiction to raise consciousness.

We have two arguments: one from the side of the objective achievements and the other from the side of the subjective or consciousness contradiction. The first: the socialists say the workers’ commissions and workers’ control are fine. Let us then pose to the socialist workers: “If you are

for workers' control, for democracy in the factory or the union because the control is done by the workers' commissions, why aren't you for democracy in all of Portugal and in favour of the whole of Portugal being controlled by the workers, as if it were a big company?" It is a powerful argument: if we control the banks and the industry, why don't we control the country?

The other argument starts with their democratic contradiction. We must ask them: "If you are for democracy everywhere, on the radio, on TV, etc., why doesn't Soares stand for election? Let each party stand for election, just like all tendencies stand for election at the University. We Trotskyists are for supporting Soares. Why doesn't he run, why does he let the military elect the president? It is the most undemocratic there is. Let's have the people elect the president."

The first is a directly revolutionary argument, the second is democratic since we will not achieve a revolutionary government through an election but we can provoke a crisis in all the socialist workers.

In six months, when this general represses the striking workers, they will say: "Gee, the only ones who said that a general should not be allowed to assume government, that this would not happen to us if Soares were president, were the Trotskyists." Soares will say what the reformists always say: "the general betrayed". When he says it, we will have already warned about it and the socialist worker will say that the Trotskyists were right. In this way, we will develop the contradiction that they promote democracy but end up saying that you have to vote for a general to be president. They are two lines combined; both aim to achieve a great mobilisation.

2. Work orientation

Where can great currents of mass mobilisation emerge? We have responded indirectly by saying we can build a great party because these currents arise. Perhaps the most difficult thing is to detect, starting with small symptoms, where they come from. We have to be very dialectical to achieve it. What we can state with certainty is that this process is inevitable. This has to sharpen dialectically and dynamically our sense of observation. Where do we have to go? Later on, we will have to consider with what slogans, what contradictions we observe in the class consciousness, etc. We start from a fundamental methodological question: if there is a revolutionary rise, great currents of masses will emerge that will be oriented towards revolutionary positions; the great task is to detect where they will come from.

In Portugal, should we focus on the structural arena (the factories, the workplaces) or the superstructural (fundamentally the Socialist, the Trade Union Congress, the Revolutionary Socialist Tendency)? Regarding the economic problem, do the unemployed develop a major trend towards revolutionary positions? It may be, they are hypotheses. We have to see whether or not they arise. Today the most concrete thing that emerges is a youth and union faction of the SP that takes very evident left positions. It is not very strong yet but it begins, it is a process. But we have to be very careful; the worst thing that can happen to us is to enter a place where there is no mass process.

If we must work on this process, how can we do it? Do we have to fight to win some comrades for our party; do we convince them about Trotskyism? Should we convince this current of the correctness of our program, and, trying to mobilise it through transitional slogans, lead it to break with its party? No. That is not mass work, something almost no Trotskyist understands. A mass current will only break with its party around slogans of mass mobilisation. It's not a matter of getting people out in bites. This is where the art of Trotskyism begins; the art consists in not making propaganda politics but raising agitational slogans since the breakup of the great mass parties only takes place by large mass mobilisations around certain slogans. Then we will recruit through the slogans, the mobilisation, not the program.

For now, in Portugal, there is no possibility of left currents emerging other than in the SP. But there are two dangers. One is sectarianism, trying to recruit militants for the program, increase fivefold and, getting drunk with the victory, to leave or get kicked out. The other danger is opportunism, in other words, not launching slogans that clearly delimit us from centrism and the opportunist

leadership of the masses on which we work. Without giving our entire program, we have to launch slogans that clearly delimit us.

3. Strategy and tactics

The words “strategy and tactics” are relative. For us, Marxists, everything is relative. Anything that is a goal is strategic but, at the same time, it can be a means to achieve another bigger, more important goal. When we speak of a goal we refer to strategy and when we speak of the means to achieve that goal we refer to tactics.

For example, we wanted to end the Villa Constitucion strike at the beginning of last year because we believed a period of great struggles was approaching and we had to prevent Villa Constitucion from being defeated by that time. What was our goal at Villa Constitucion? Once the government comptroller was removed and the UOM came, we said the workers’ movement should be satisfied because we could not go beyond that; the release of prisoners requires a general strike and there were no conditions. All we would do was to visit Piccinini¹⁴ in jail, prepare the flyers, go to the demonstrations. That was tactical regarding our strategy, which was to end the strike. In turn, this strategy of raising the strike was tactical regarding the great battle that we expected. It was tactical to prevent Villa Constitucion from being defeated because, as the vanguard of the workers’ movement at that time, it would also be so when the great strike came. It did not happen that way. Villa Constitucion was crushed and when the strike came it played no role because we failed in our strategy for that place, therefore in our tactic for the general strike.

What general strategy do we have in Portugal in this revolutionary situation? A combined strategy around three goals. There are two goals which are historically permanent: to build the party and to take power. When we are in a revolutionary situation, a third goal arises which acts as an intermediary or mediator joining the two poles; only at this stage can we build the party with mass influence, only at this stage can power be seized, and precisely at this stage the element that allows us to do so arises: the organs of power.

In Portugal, this is the strategic goal. And what are the tactics? What characterises a revolutionary situation is that the means change, sometimes from day to day, week to week. This is what the SWP does not understand; they support, almost permanently, an SP-CP government. The tactics and the means change very quickly because it is a revolutionary stage. For example, to oppose above all the Popular Assembly and the unions created by Spínola.¹⁵ The Stalinist unions and the MFA tried to control the workers’ committees from the Popular Assembly. We had a specific tactic: to develop the workers’ committees, trying to centralise them in a congress and, along with that, “Out the unions and the Popular Assembly, no control.” Another tactic is the fight against the productivity plan raised by the CP, the “voluntary” work on public holidays. One reason they hated Vasco Goncalves¹⁶ is that he campaigned for workers to work for free on Saturdays and Sundays. Therefore, “That the workers don’t work on the weekends!”

Tactics become important according to the situation. Perhaps, when the Constituent Assembly’s productivity plan was launched, it went into the background. Another tactic is that of workers’ and soldiers’ militias. There is a fundamental tactic which is decisive for this stage: sticking next to the socialist masses for the defence of democratic freedoms.

14 **Alberto Piccinini**, union leader of the Acindar steel plant, in the town of Villa Constitucion, Santa Fe Province. He led an important succession of conflicts and participated in an important construction of workers’ organisations that changed the union-political balance of the 1970s.

15 **Antonio de Spínola** (1910–1996) was a Portuguese military officer and conservative politician. He was President of Portugal between 15 May 1974 and 30 September 1974.

16 General **Vasco Goncalves** (1921–2005) was a Portuguese army officer who served as Prime Minister from 18 July 1974 to 19 September 1975.

The creation of the workers' commissions is the strategy, the permanent. In all stages, since Caetano¹⁷ fell, we tried to develop and create organs of power. There is something we have always raised since then: let's develop the workers' commissions, let's develop the soldiers' committees. This continues because it is strategic. The strategy is made up of three lines that form a knot in the same rope: strengthening the party, raising the need for the working class to take power and make the revolution, and developing the organs of power. That is the permanent thing.

What position do the Majority and SWP have regarding the means, the tactics and the strategy? The minority presents a strategy in Key Issues, although they do not consider it this way: the workers' and peasants' government. And before, they had already proposed the line of democracy, which in fact is their strategy; they transform a tactic into a strategy.

The Majority lacks the building of the party with mass influence as a strategic goal. Regarding the problem of power, they are also very confusing. They are correct in that it is necessary to develop the organs of workers' power but they do not propose for this power to defeat the bourgeois power as a whole. They never say "these organs of workers' power go against the MFA, the government", nor "these organs of workers' power have to be accompanied by a revolutionary Marxist party that leads them to defeat the bourgeoisie". They are correct but they are unilateral, they do not see the three aspects combined.

Another of their flaws is that they transform strategy into tactics. They have no tactics and without tactics, the strategy cannot be developed because this is the abstract aspect of our politics and the tactic is the concrete aspect.

Contrary to the Majority, we have a whole: a correct overall strategy that takes the building of the party, the organs of power, and that clearly states what must be done is the workers' revolution, to take power and defeat the bourgeoisie, that it is possible to make a party and the revolution in Portugal.

4. Government formula

There is a privileged tactic which is fundamental because it poses the decisive problem of power. It is the specific tactic of how we are concretising the government formula so that the masses break with the bourgeoisie and link to a policy that raises the need for a government of the working class, independent of the bourgeoisie.

But it must be carefully formulated. In the Russian Revolution, Lenin held the tactic of workers' and peasants' government for a single week, during the Kornilov uprising. He did not raise it permanently because he studied how the consciousness of the masses was. What varies is the formulation but it is a very important permanent tactic because it accompanies the fundamental strategic need for the working class to take power away from the bourgeoisie. It is the tactical expression of how we are adapting this essential line, which is the axis of all our politics.

In the *Transitional Program*, we see how the formula, the slogan of workers' and peasants' government must be concretised. Trotsky says that when there are mass parties, we, based on of an anti-capitalist transitional program, have to ask them to break with the bourgeoisie so they adopt our program and take power, which fulfils a great educational role. Trotsky believes it is very difficult for it to be a slogan for action, that it will not be achieved.

The Third International-poses four types of government: one is the workers' and peasants' government, but another—the first of the four cases it analyses—is the slogan of the capitalist-workers government, which is our famous slogan "That a deputy of the CGT take over the government". It is not a workers' and peasants' government because we did not propose an anti-capitalist program, it does not affect the structure of the regime, but it is a fabulous slogan because it raises the consciousness of the masses. From a capitalist-workers' government to a workers' and

¹⁷ **Marcello Caetano** (1906–1980) was a Portuguese politician who was the last prime minister of the *Estado Novo* regime, from 1968 until his overthrow in the Revolution of 1974.

peasants' government there is much less distance than between Isabel¹⁸ and a workers' and peasants' government.

5. Program and slogans

The program provides all the revolutionary, transitional, and democratic answers to the great objective problems facing the country, just as our global program answers to the great objective problems that humanity faces. The program responds to objective historical needs. It is the abstract, the general, but decisive. They are the general behaviour guidelines.

The slogan is the immediate, the concrete, not the abstract. In fact, it is the most difficult art of Trotskyism. Through the slogans the entire program becomes concrete. Contact with the masses, listening to the masses, studying the economic relationship, the link with the International, having a line on an international, national, regional scale, within each sector, all this ends in a specific question, in the combination of a few phrases which are the slogans.

What are these slogans, to which Trotsky gives so much importance and which for us make up the decisive element in a stage of revolutionary mobilisation? They are the phrases, the instructions to mobilise the masses. The masses can only be mobilised if the slogan is a bridge, a means between consciousness and their immediate need. This is why it is so difficult to make a slogan since it must not only reflect the immediate need of the masses but link it with their level of consciousness.

We must also achieve a formulation that reflects the tradition, the language of the country. Trotsky's example concerning the USA is very illustrative. When the masses believed in Roosevelt there but there were many unemployed, the immediate need was for the unemployed to have a wage and a job; the immediate consciousness was that they believed in Roosevelt. How did Trotsky solve the problem? Raising: "Let's make a big mobilisation to ask Roosevelt to give us work." It is the best example against the ultra-leftists because Roosevelt's was an imperialist government, much worse than Peron's. And yet, Trotsky launched it because he wanted mobilisation, he wanted to find a phrase that mobilises. In other words, he was trying to bridge the gap between consciousness and need to see if the class would mobilise. What did it matter if Roosevelt was asked if five or 10 million unemployed in America made a march on Washington? Everything would change from then on. The important thing was to get them moving. That is the role of the slogans. Mobilisation is done through slogans; the class moves through the proposal of simple tasks.

But around the slogans, we can fall into a very common methodological error: believing that everything revolves around a single slogan. This is very serious and causes abstract, ridiculous discussions, this slogan or the other as if it were a bet. Trotskyist politics is always a constellation, the union of several slogans, not one. It is a slogan structure. Trotsky raised it on different occasions. The problem is in how the slogan is structured, which is fundamental, which is the contingent, which is the decisive, etc. This elaboration is combined with tactics and strategy.

We always find the red knot of a slogan that is decisive and others that are secondary. We can say that this combination of slogans makes the strategy and the program of a revolutionary stage. All the slogans, and how they are combined, make the specific program of the revolution, which is not the country's historical program.

The program of a revolutionary stage is made up of all the slogans we handle and how they are combined. Revolutionary politics never revolves around a single slogan because this would mean the entire working class has a single level of consciousness and not different levels with uneven development. This objective problem of the uneven development of the consciousness and the level of class struggle, when they not all go out together or have the same level of consciousness requires that the program be uneven but combined.

"Peace, bread and freedom", which was the great slogan, "Out with the ten ministers", "Let the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks take power", etc., together with "All Power to the

¹⁸ **Maria Estela Martinez de Peron** (b. 1931), better known as **Isabel Martinez de Peron** or **Isabel Peron** was the third wife of Juan Peron. She served as President of Argentina from 1974 to 1976.

Soviets” —which at one point Lenin changes—were part of the slogans raised in the process of the Russian Revolution, which, correctly combined, led to victory. The combination is very difficult and makes to the science and art of the revolutionaries. We can give some general laws, all discovered by the Yankee comrades (although they apply them very poorly). A great contribution they made 20 years ago was to specify that there are propaganda, agitation and action slogans.

Propaganda slogans are to convince, to chat. For example: “That the CP-SP unite and make a common government” was a fantastic slogan to have a coffee with the socialist and communist workers, chatting with them separately, not together. It wasn’t for action, it was for chatting. There was no possibility that it were for action because there was no mobilisation for unity, in fact, on the street the socialist and communist workers clashed, But it was still a great propaganda slogan to start a discussion, cause several doubts, but chatting; thus, we cannot mobilise the masses with that slogan. Afterwards, we would see, according to the process.

There is another great slogan for chatting which is more important than that: “Let’s develop the workers’ commissions, let’s centralise them, let’s make the workers’ revolution together with the soldiers’ commissions and take power.” It is also propaganda. There is no chance the workers’ committees will hold a congress and take power. But both are very good.

Agitative slogans are what we use when conversing with millions of people. They listen to us, they say: “Trotskyists propose coherent things”, they like the slogan. For example, in Portugal we chose three well-combined, linked, and agitative slogans: 1) “Out with the government the military wants to impose on us”; 2) “For a government elected by the people and the parties”; 3) “The Trotskyists support Soares for president.” They are agitative because everyone will say we are right: why put a general? Nobody will vote for us or pay attention because the weight of Soares is still very great. But they will listen to us and they will say: “not bad, it would be very nice if Soares were president, what a pity he does not want it.” It is agitative as 40 or 50 per cent will say: “the Trotskyists interpret us, I want Soares as president.” They still won’t say “what a scoundrel, he doesn’t want to be”, but they will say “what a pity”. And we will not say either: “what a scoundrel, he doesn’t want to be”, we have to say: “Soares for President”; if we say “what a scoundrel” they will not listen to us. And when tomorrow the military represses them and Soares says “he betrayed us”, if we say “it is not treason, crushing he fulfils his military duty because he is an agent of the bourgeoisie”, at that time many, probably tens of thousands, will say: “Soares was not right, the Trotskyists were.”

The slogans that we launch so the workers take to the streets, fight, or do something are the slogans *for action*. They are the most important and difficult to achieve. In this regard, there is another great discussion with the Yankees because they are not dialectical. The slogan of the workers’ commissions is a propaganda slogan but at the same time, it is the only possible slogan for action. It is the most propagandistic, we have to pave the way for it with the newspaper, convince for the seizure of power, say that suffrage and nationalisations are useless if we do not take power. But: “Let’s defend, develop and centralise the workers’ commissions” is the only one for action. It is what the masses have been doing for two years now, not us. Combined with that of the Socialists, it is giving us an extraordinary result. Not proposing the seizure of power, since that is not even agitative, it is propagandistic, but the slogan of founding, developing, centralising and defending the workers’ commissions is for action.

There are also other slogans for action. In the economic arena: “Down with the wage freeze”, “Let’s go on strike for an increase in wages”, “Workers’ control of the factories that stop”, etc. Another, of an institutional nature: “For a great worker-union congress to achieve a single democratic centre.” They are feasible, the socialists also push. There are several transitional slogans for action that are fundamental, and vary. But there is one for action, strategic, that does not vary, which is to develop and centralise the workers’ commissions.

All the slogans put together and combined —agitative, propagandistic and for action— make the program for Portugal. Of which the most important is “Founding, developing, defending and centralising the workers’ and soldiers’ commissions.”